

THE Quarterly

Autumn 2023

Learning How To Believe In Myself



Juan learned "how to keep going where I am aiming."

For just shy of two years, Juan Lopez has been working in the kitchen at The College of New Jersey, where he's been accepted into the union, received a raise, and where they just created a poster featuring him as being "dressed for success."

Now, he starts each day the same way.

Waking up bright and early, he goes downstairs to make himself a cup of coffee, and, while it's brewing, he opens the kitchen window to hear birds singing outside the place he now calls home on Boudinot Street in Trenton.

"He remembers the bumpy ride on his way to The Mission, feeling like he was between two worlds."

Then he smiles at the thought of another morning when he is not looking at the world through prison bars.

Three years ago, when the New Jersey State Parole Board granted Juan the opportunity to leave prison and attend the counseling program in The Mission's Behavioral Health Center, all he knew for certain about himself was that he was a fighter.

In this issue, we share inspiring stories about the struggles, opportunities and successes of those we serve.

1 When Juan came to The Mission, all he knew for certain about himself was that he was a fighter.

3 For the first time in his life, after coming to The Mission, Benjamin is now living in his own apartment.

4 Allen completed his 24-Hour Fundraising Run for The Mission, raising just shy of \$63,000.

8 Certified Peer Recovery Specialists can connect with people in recovery in deep and meaningful ways.

Forty-four years earlier, at the age of 17, he got into a fight in a pool hall with someone who died from a stab wound.

"In a blur, an argument led to a fight, and I was facing a life sentence in Trenton State Prison, which they called The Last Stop. I can still hear the sound of the doors slamming behind me, as I entered the prison. Trenton State was haunting. The convicts were dangerous. They still had the row of cells on death row leading up to the room with the wooden chair and straps where people had been electrocuted for years." He paused, then added, "I never thought I'd get out. I felt

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Learning How To Believe In Myself

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like my life was over.”

That first day, Juan was in the mess hall, carrying his lunch on a metal tray, trying to find a place to sit, and, he said, “a huge guy just reached over and grabbed all the food on my tray.”

Later, in the yard, a soft-spoken guy with round glasses, who was a little shorter than Juan, approached him and said, “You have to learn how to protect yourself.”

“He took me under his wing,” Juan said. “He showed me the ropes. Taught me how to box. And became my mentor. I called him Mr. Carter, out of respect. I didn’t realize at the time that he was Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter, the celebrated middleweight contender who was wrongfully convicted.”

Over time, eventually, Juan was transferred from the maximum-security prison to more lenient prisons within New Jersey.

Then, after more than four decades, he was granted parole, with the stipulation that he complete a counseling program in The Mission’s Behavioral Health Center.

He remembers that bumpy ride on his way to The Mission, feeling like he was between two worlds. “When I climbed out of the back of the van, and they took the handcuffs off me,” he recalled, “I started to cry. The driver said, ‘Good luck.’ And I thanked him a lot. And I assured him that he would never see me again. This was my first taste of freedom. It was my second chance. And I knew I was somehow going to make it work.”

At The Mission, Juan said, “I took advantage of all they had to offer. They helped me with counseling – where I learned patience, how to cope with difficult situations, and how to understand my strengths and overcome my limitations. They taught me vocational skills

– including how to interview for jobs, time management, and creating realistic goals. And when I was ready to leave, they helped me find supportive housing, where I am now trusted to be a house manager.” He added, “They provided

“Now, I enjoy my freedom, which can be as simple as looking forward to going to my job – and opening a window in the morning to hear birds singing.”

me with enormous opportunities. And I soaked it all in.”

He recalled that after he had applied for a job, and the interview seemed very promising, he was waiting for the results of his background check, which was the final step in the hiring process at The College of New Jersey. While they were aware of his past, checking on his background seemed to be taking forever to Juan. And he started to feel dejected. He told his counselor at The Mission, “I knew it wasn’t going to work out. They must have found out something about me that made them change their minds.” His

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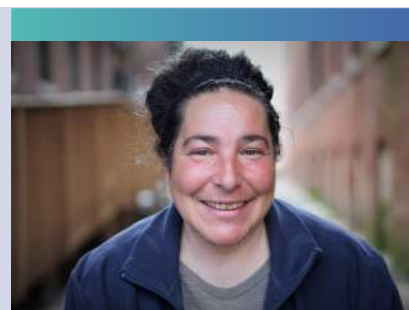
counselor just smiled and encouraged him to call the college. That’s when he heard the recruiter say, “It’s great to hear your voice, Juan. I was just going to call you to offer you the job.”

“Thanks to The Mission,” Juan said, “I have finally come to believe in myself.”

From time to time, he remembers Rubin “Hurricane” Carter quietly saying to him, “You have to fight for what you believe in. You’re not just throwing random punches. Go for your target.

Know you’re going to get hit. Maybe knocked down. That’s part of the game. Accept that. Then keep going where you are aiming. That’s how you will come up victorious.”

Juan added, “Now, I enjoy my freedom – which can be as simple as looking forward to going to my job; heading to the beach on my day off; eating with my own fork, knife and spoon; and opening a window in the morning to hear birds singing.”



Your donation can make a difference!

Please donate now.

You can make a real difference.

If you are in a position to help, your donation will immediately provide food for those who are hungry, housing for those who are homeless, counseling for those seeking recovery, and life-changing opportunities.

Rescue  **Mission**
of Trenton



Please donate now.

Traveling a Long Way to Finally Come Home

After coming to The Shelter a little over a year ago, Benjamin Taylor is now, for the first time ever, living in his own apartment.

"It's pretty nice," he said, his eyes lighting up, as he described the place he now calls home in Rowan Towers on West State Street in Trenton. "It has a small kitchen, a living room, a bathroom with a shower and a bedroom. Out the window I've got a great view of a playground and park nearby. And there's basketball courts where I just started playing a little."

Originally from New Jersey, Benjamin had been traveling since he was 23 years old, picking up temporary labor and staying in Shelters in places as far away from his home state as he could find.

"When I was a baby, my mom gave me to a foster family. That was not very copacetic," he added. "This new family and I did not get along very well. What I learned was that you can still love people who don't care about you much."

Then when he was 15 years old, Benjamin was placed in a foster home on Stuyvesant Avenue in Trenton. "I was going to vocational school," he said. "But it was hard for me to learn. I'm a slow learner. Eventually, I had to leave because I couldn't learn too well. So, I thought it was best for me to go and find better things."

He returned to the city of Elizabeth, where he was born, but found no purpose in being back there.

Then, when he was 23 years old, he said, he saw his mother in an office building in Newark. "I had not seen her since I was a baby. But I knew right away that it was her." He's not sure that she saw him, though. Or that she would even know who he was. He didn't approach her. He didn't know what to say. He just stared. "It was very



Benjamin is now, for the first time ever, living in his own apartment.

shocking," he said. He took it as a sign, although he was not sure what it meant. "Somehow, I felt grateful," he said, "just feeling a connection." Then, he just walked away.

That was when Benjamin decided to leave New Jersey. "I figured it was time for me to go out on the road, and find some opportunities," he said.

"I saw some beautiful places. But I never found any place I could call home."

"I would stay by myself a lot," he explained. "I met some nice people, going from town to town." For the next four decades, he didn't stay any place for too long. He sojourned around Florida, then all over California, then throughout the Midwest, staying in shelters and finding temporary employment. "I saw some beautiful places. But I never found any place I could call home," he shared.

That was until last year, when he decided it was time to stop roaming and come back to Trenton.

"I came right to The Shelter," he said. "And I asked if there was some way I could stay here while I volunteered and helped out." While staying at The Shelter, Benjamin appreciatively dusted and mopped the floors in the kitchen and dining room. "For the first time, I felt like I knew where I was going to stay," he said. "This is the first time I started climbing up the ladder."

Sensing his determination, Case Managers in The Shelter were glad to help Benjamin get his State Identification, food stamps, general assistance, health insurance, and permanent housing (including his first month's rent and a security deposit from the Mercer County Board of Social Services).

Reflecting on his life, nodding his head, as if in agreement, Benjamin said, "I've traveled a long way. And I've finally come home."



Allen, after running for 24 hours, crossing the finish line.

Volunteer Runs 72 Miles To Raise Funds For The Mission

Allen Collins, a successful entrepreneur, a volunteer faculty member at The Mission, and recovering addict, completed his 24-Hour Fundraising Run along the 72 miles of Appalachian Trail in New Jersey with smiles, time and energy to spare – raising nearly \$63,000 for The New Direction Program.

His family, friends, along with the president, counselors, recent graduates and alumni of The New Direction Program all exuberantly greeted him at the finish line – as an eagle flew overhead.

Allen undertook this personal challenge because, as he said, “I’ve been so impressed by the transformational changes I’ve seen in people in recovery at The Mission.” The New Direction Program was designed to show individuals in recovery something they may have never seen before – which is their potential.

As he crossed the finish line, recent graduates from The New Direction Program surrounded him, and one of them recalled Allen saying to the class, “I’ve been where you are. That’s why I’m here

“I undertook this challenge because I’ve been so impressed by the transformational changes I’ve seen in people in recovery at The Mission.”

for you. And I’m here to tell you that if you can hustle enough to support a drug habit, you just have to turn that discipline and drive around to create positive results for yourself. If I can do it, you can, too. Discipline equals freedom.”

When asked, “What was the most difficult part of your run?” Allen said, “Around 1:00 am, I was getting a little



Allen running through the night.

tired and went down a hill. It took me about 15 minutes to realize I was heading in the wrong direction. So I had to turn around and come back up the hill, losing precious time. That was deflating.” Smiling wide, he added, “Then several hours later, I saw the sun rise over the mountains. And it was glorious.”

If you’d like to donate, just go to RescueMissionOfTrenton.org.

Football Club Donates to the Food Pantry

We are extremely grateful to the Mercer United Football Club for undertaking a drive to help those we serve in our Food Pantry.

The young players and their families graciously gathered and donated boxes upon boxes of food and supplies for our neighbors who are struggling to put food on their tables.

“We talked about some of the struggles faced by those in our community who are less fortunate. And we talked about how we could help.”

Keith Monacchio, an Executive Board Member and Coach for the Club, which has 16 teams of young people, ages 8 through 17, from all over the county, said, “The kids we work with are great. And they realize they are fortunate. So, we are always very glad to give back. We talked about some of the struggles faced by those in our community who are less fortunate. And we talked about how we could help. Then they made it happen. I am very proud of them.”

Barrett Young, CEO of The Mission, thanked the Club members for their compassion, their generosity, and the values they nurture in young people – including being there for each other and caring for others who are less fortunate. Barrett added, “We opened our Food Pantry two years ago, in collaboration with the leadership teams at Mercer Street Friends Center and The Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. Since then, over 5,000 individual family members have received nutritious food. And that number continues to grow.”

The harsh reality is that nearly one



Yesenia, Valentino and Sahori wait their turn in a rocking chair to go shopping inside our Food Pantry.

out of every two children under the age of six in Trenton is living below the poverty line. That means that most of these children are starting their day without breakfast – which, studies show, significantly impacts their focus and performance in school, as well as their chances of succeeding later in life.

“With the help of caring individu-

als and organizations like the Mercer United Football Club, we will be here – helping those who are struggling to put food on their tables,” Barrett said.

“We collected food last year, this year and we will do it again next year,” Keith responded, with a promise that could also be the Club’s motto.

Enhancing the Professional Credentials of Our Essential Workers

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here. And I'll listen and help in any way I can."

Barrett added, "To succeed as an employee at The Mission, it takes an enormous amount of dedication, compassion, patience, resilience, and professionalism. Because those we serve are so vulnerable, every day can bring unexpected challenges, not the least of which is administering Narcan (a potentially lifesaving nasal spray

"I have close family members who have gone through recovery, and I always felt that if I could help someone, I wanted to be there."

medication that can revive someone who has overdosed on opioids), which was administered 23 times last year. To overcome these challenges, we are focusing on providing professional training to our staff, many of whom were former clients. Our goal is to provide them with further expertise, along with a well-deserved salary increase, so they see their work and themselves as true professionals.

"Thanks to a generous grant from The Tepper Foundation," Barrett said, "we were able to create a new position for Beverly Dash, who has become The Mission's Employee Empowerment Coach, where she is assisting Emergency Shelter Associates in our Shelter and Recovery Aides in our Behavioral Health Center, who have direct experience in recovering from addiction, to become Certified Peer Recovery Specialists." The staff we are focusing on for this program comprise 37% of our workforce, many of whom work two jobs. Prior to Beverly taking this new position, The Mission had five employees who had completed the State's Certification Pro-

gram. Since she started in June, there are eleven more individuals who have completed, and two who are currently going through the program, which requires 46 hours of training, after 500 hours of work experience.

Sara McMillan, who has been at The Mission for nearly seven years, just became a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist. While she never experienced addiction herself, she shared that her motivation comes from a very personal place. "I have close family members who have gone through recovery," she said, "and I always felt that if I could help someone, I wanted to be there."

"As a child, growing up in West Trenton," she added, "I knew what it was not having enough food, no Christmas, no birthdays, because there was a sickness. I was too young to understand what was going on. I've come to learn that you can't fault anybody for having a sickness."

"I could not understand at the time why my mom went from job to job." She paused, then added, "My mom is now a success story in herself. It's going on 25 years that she's been clean and sober by herself. And I am very proud of her."

Sara added, "Some people dismiss anyone who becomes addicted, saying they chose that lifestyle. But I know that's not the case. That's why I'm here. To help people. And one of the things I've learned is that when someone is ready to be helped, that's when you want to be there. Because a little bit later may be too late. So, I want to be there when someone is ready. Every training I see, I go for it. I love learning. And helping others to find their way."

Recently Sara helped a woman in The Shelter, "who was deteriorating. I checked her backpack, and she had a big bottle of Fireball. I said to her, 'You

know your doctor said this will destroy you.' The next day, she thanked me for showing that I cared. And she said that she poured the alcohol down the drain. Then she started turning her life around. We were able to qualify her for housing. I helped her set up her apartment, paint it and decorate it. You get close to people when they are struggling. And when they're succeeding. Now she has a glow about her. I see her shopping in Shop Rite. And her smile lights up the place."

Sara smiled, then said, "I wish I could help everybody. I do."

Howard Hemingway's commitment is as strong as Sara's, though his story, like all stories, is somewhat different.

"My addiction," he said, "was to profit."

"I never did drugs," he shared, "but I made a lot of money, and did a lot of damage to a lot of families by selling drugs."

"One of the things I've learned is that when someone is ready to be helped, that's when you want to be there. Because a little bit later may be too late."

He grew up around the corner from The Mission, until his family moved to Hamilton Township. By the time he was 14, thanks to some older friends who showed him the way, he was selling drugs. "Growing up in a poor household," he said, "I just looked around at my options, and this seemed like a no-brainer. It was easy. And the money just flowed. So, it was just as easy to become addicted to the lifestyle."

Fast forward, and, at the age of 40, after completing his second prison sentence, Howard said, "I realized that the money goes, your so-called friends

go, and all you're left with is who you are inside. And I felt empty. I had caused a lot of despair – for myself and for so many others."

Since 2017, he has been working as a Recovery Aide at The Mission, making a fraction of what he was making selling drugs, and, as he said, "feeling, in a way I never did before, a profound sense

"Sometimes, when someone is ready, a light goes on, and a change starts to occur. To be there in those moments. To help someone in any way. That's why I'm here."

of purpose and fulfillment."

Having just earned his State Certification as a Peer Recovery Specialist, Howard said, "It is like I am restoring some of the damage I did for so long to so many families. I see people I grew up with coming here, seeking help. And I get to work with them, to talk with them, and, hopefully, in some way, I'm able to add some kind of light to their lives." Wiping away a tear, he said, "I get

emotional when I talk about this. I still feel like I'm making amends for all the damage I've done. Now, I see part of myself in others. Our conversations get to the heart of the matter.

And sometimes, when someone is ready, a light goes on, and a change starts to occur. To be there in those moments. To help someone in any way. That's why I'm here."



Howard said, "I get emotional when I talk about this. I see part of myself in others."

Your Gently Used Clothes Can Make a World of Difference for Someone in Need

We gratefully accept donations of gently used clothes - which will immediately help someone who knocks on our Shelter's door – because they have nowhere else to turn.

Your donations also provide a very affordable way for our patrons to find clothing of great value in our Thrift Store, which they could not find anywhere nearby.

And we make it convenient for you to donate clothing in our drop-off-boxes located throughout our community.

Another way you can support those we serve is by hosting a clothing drive through your company, business, school, faith-based organization, or civic group.

HOW TO DONATE

For more information, call **David at (609) 695-1436 ext. 306.**

You can also find a Clothing Donation Box near you by clicking on our website: **RescueMissionOfTrenton.org** – then slide down to the bottom of our homepage and click on **Clothing Box Locations.**



Hasly and her mom Angelica found a vast array of choices for school shopping in our Thrift Store.



Please
donate
now.

Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, counseling those seeking recovery, and providing life-changing opportunities.

Enhancing the Professional Credentials of Our Essential Workers

When individuals in recovery successfully reach the completion of The Mission's extensive, in-depth residential treatment program, those who seem to be doing exceptionally well often speak of experiencing a profound shift in their lives, of having a newfound sense of direction, of feeling enormously grateful, while knowing they still have important amends to make – and, sometimes, of wanting to give back, to make their lives meaningful by helping others who are trying to recover.

For those who do return to The Mission, like Kenneth Smith, who last year completed the training to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, they become important role models for those who are early on their road to recovery – providing a ray of hope and a daily example that success is possible. "Kenneth readily identifies with people who are just entering recovery," said Barrett Young, CEO of The Mission. "He knows what they're going through, and he can connect with them in the moment, where they are, in very meaningful ways."

In addition to lived experience,



Sara said, "I wish I could help everybody. I do."

Certified Peer Recovery Specialists like Kenneth have completed extensive training, including supervision and course work that covers recovery, communication, values, ethics, motivation,

"As a child, growing up, I knew what it was not having enough food, no Christmas, no birthdays, because there was a sickness."

co-occurring disorders, trauma-informed care and wellness. Kenneth shared, "I'm not a counselor. Still, I'm able to get many of the residents to open up and allow me in. And I'll let them know that, in my early stages of recovery, I knew what I needed to do, but I wasn't doing it. So, I was just lying to myself, and to others. Then I let them know that if they want to lie to themselves, there is nothing I can do to help them. But if they want to be truthful, I'm

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